

D.C. Protest Provides New Insights

Published as a guest editorial in *Public Opinion*, Chambersburg, PA, April 21, 2000.

This week in Washington, Mobilization for Global Justice protestors and the D.C. Police Department pioneered a breakthrough in peaceful civil disobedience and the non-violent strategy spawned by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Carrying flowers given to them by the protestors, Police Chief Charles Ramsey and Assistant Police Chief Terry Gainer kept the calm and were open to dialog.

“It is important for all of us to look at this from different perspectives,” said Ramsey in a C-Span interview on Monday, April 17. “There is a lot to be learned.”

At the 20th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue perimeter barrier, established by the police to keep protestors away from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank buildings where bank officials had assembled for their annual meeting, protestors explained to police why they were there and why they were prepared to be arrested for their concerns. They also talked about the role of the police in a democracy at a time of massive protest. By negotiating a diplomatic zone for protestors and police to dialog, a potentially violent confrontation was avoided.

Protestors and police then agreed upon an opening of the barrier, through which protestors could walk into the closed-off zone behind the line, and the actions that would be taken by both police and protestors after the crossing.

Four hundred protestors then proceeded behind the lines for what was termed “voluntary arrest” where they were then calmly handcuffed and taken into detention. Protestors were thus able to demonstrate their determined resistance to institutions they believe to be unjust and inequitable, but without damage to either persons or property.

My experience with the tens of thousands of others who participated in the Mobilization for Global Justice was profound and life changing. Dozens of teach-ins and educational events were held in the streets, churches, synagogues, and universities of Washington, D.C. from April 8 - 17. Hundreds of speakers from all over the world spoke with dignity, fervor and knowledge. All spoke with determination, compassion and concern to bring an end to hunger, homelessness, poverty

and exploitation everywhere. All spoke with courage to build a world that works for everyone.

At a Mobilization press conference one of the reporters asked, "How can you use us to help you, now that we have awakened? There is clearly a deep, deep flaw in Western civilization."

As I was leaving the Ellipse at the end of the Sunday rally, a security guard told me I was not allowed to carry my sign into the subway because it had a stick. He told me the stick was dangerous. He said that was the rule. So I broke the stick off over my knee, but he said that the four inches remaining was still a stick. So I broke that off with my hand and he said, "that's good enough for me" and allowed me to pass into the Metro.

I think it is a rather strange world, when my tax dollars pay for bombs and attack Apache helicopters and fighter planes and police batons and tear gas, but the stick on my little pretty protest sign which says "The Earth Belongs to Everyone" is considered a threat to public safety.

The philosopher Joseph Campbell once said that there is a new myth arising, a new story around which people everywhere will rally. This is the story of the one earth and the one human family. A beautiful introduction to this story unfolded this week in Washington.

The author's
grandson
Aidan Hartzok
holding
The Sign.

